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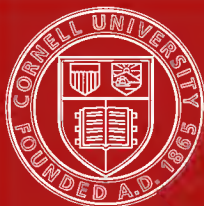
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THE FIRST AMERICAN
AND OTHER POEMS

BY

KENNETH C. M. SILLS

Inter silvas Academi quaerere verum.

HORACE.

BRUNSWICK, MAINE

1911

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TO HENRY JOHNSON

*“Quoi dono lepidum novom libellum
Arido modo pumice expositum?
Corneli, tibi; namque tu solebas
Meas esse aliquid putare nugas.”*

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THE FIRST AMERICAN

I

GOD save the State! And send us in our need
More men like him who during troublous time
With patient courage in his word and deed
Magnanimously wrought the task sublime.
Heeding not praise nor blame, only the right,
He bore the burden, and left a portrait great
Whereon all men may gaze and see the light
Shine softly on his face who served the State.

II

Today we call on those who hate the State,
The sullen, alien few who will not see
The freedom that is ours, and won of late,
Not license is, but law-bound liberty,
To lay their hatred by, put strife aside
And seek to know how righteous is our law.
Gaze on his face! O take him for your guide
And see our country's kindness, as he saw.

Written for the Lincoln centennial exercises held by
Bowdoin College, February 12, 1909.

III

And ye who are suspicious of the State,
Who know the cruelty of restless task,
Who look upon the rich with eyes of hate,
And feel that power and wealth, under the mask
Of perjured justice, rule and sway the land,
O lay not to our country this sin's charge.
Gaze on his face! And strive to understand
How righteous is her mission and how large.

IV

And ye who are despairing of the State,
Ye warped, if earnest, souls who often think
That men are evil, worse the times of late,
The country each year nearer ruin's brink;
What though Corruption boldly stalks abroad
And puny men now strut where giants strode?
Gaze on his face! Truth ever routeth fraud
And bringeth peace, though long and hard the road.

V

And ye who are indifferent to the State,
Who will not soil your lily hands to vote
Nor join with better men the wrongs so great
To right: who shun the battle and who quote
"Not mine the thankless task, for all the signs
Are bad." Ye lazy, lukewarm sons and tame,
Gaze on his face! Mark well the rugged lines
Made by hard toil! Look long and take fresh shame.

VI

And ye who now and then would serve the State,
Whose bosoms glow, when flags are flying free,
Ye vow your deeds your words shall some day mate,
But in great danger lies our liberty.
Long is the task; eternal ages wait
While free men all their glorious battles fight.
Gaze on his face! Learn ere it be too late,
To toil, as he did toil, into the night.

VII

And ye who from your hearts do love the State,
Whether in war or in the arts of peace
Ye strive to make our country truly great,
Know well all loyal efforts must not cease;
For this Republic only standeth fast
In men and in her freedom richly won.
Gaze on his face! Think on the mighty past
And gird you for the work still to be done.

AFTER READING THE ALCESTIS

BEFORE the dome to the bright Sun God dear
The selfish King bore forth his loyal wife,
A self-made ransom for her lord fore-doomed;
And in the shining court yard sadly loomed
Grim Thanatos, all darkening hope and life,
While mid the gloom Alcestis cried in fear,
“Shadowy on my eyes comes the night creeping.”

Across life's stage, when all seems fresh and fair,
The Sun God brightly shining as of yore,
There stalks with step relentless, slow and grim
That same dark form, now shading you, now him,
Now me. We feel its dimming presence more and more
And cry in tones that beat the murky air,
“Shadowy on my eyes comes the night creeping.”

THE SEXTON

A TALL and silent man was he,
I met him by the gate;
With spade full long and strong he toiled
And toiled till it was late.

I watched him for a little space,
I pondered on the scene,
The sun lit up the quiet stones,
Long shadows streaked the green.

“And how fare all your dead tonight?”

I asked, nor asked in vain.

“In truth, sir, I hear no complaints.”

I walked on down the lane.

THE THORNDIKE OAK

ALL Bowdoin's sons have sat once at my feet,
And poets, warriors, statesmen have I seen
Tarry in youth beneath my boughs of green,
Then pass along, while I their sons' sons greet.

A FRIEND AND BROTHER

A FRIEND and brother!" Speak the words so low
And whisper them in halls where he was dear.
As passing in a grove where fragrant cheer
Of flowers manifold at twilight's glow
Hushes the air with calm so sweet, so slow
That softly we walk on nor dread the drear
Beyond, so his life frees us from our fear
And bids us onward till the light we know.

Though Death's dark asterisk had marked his name,
Life with the golden pen of deeds that are
And skill immortal, underneath Death's frown
Gilded that spot with such effulgent flame
That now it gleams, a glory-giving star,
And beckons on to service and renown.

“MY LADY OF ALL SAINTS”

DANTE. SONNET XXIX

OF ladies fair I saw a gentle band
On last All Saints' Day passing on their way.
One first of all there went, on whose right hand
Was Love, led on neath her full gentle sway.
Forth from her eyes there flashed a flame so grand
It seemed as if it were a fiery fay;
And thence I had such ardor that I scanned
Her face and found that there an angel lay.
Whoe'er was worthy, she saluted well
With eyes and person all benign and shy,
Making his breast with virtue's strength to swell;
Her birth, I know, was in the heavens on high;
On earth for our salvation doth she dwell;
Wherefore she blesses all her company.

“THE BOAT OF LOVE”

DANTE. SONNET XXXII

GUIDO, I would that Lapo, thee and me
A sweet enchantment's power might come and bind,
And set down in a boat that to each wind
At your good will and mine would sail the sea;
So that in no rough waves nor tempest free
The slightest hindrance to our ease we'd find,
But living e'er with one desire in mind,
Desire to dwell together increased should be.

The lady Beatrice, lady Vanna too
And Lapo's love who's numbered in my rhyme
The good enchanter should set down with us,
And there fair Love we ever would discuss;
Each one of them content would pass the time,
As I believe would he and I and you.

SONS OF BOWDOIN

A COLLEGE SONG

RISE! Sons of Bowdoin! praise her fame!
And sing aloud her glorious name,
To Bowdoin, Bowdoin, lift your song,
And may the music echo long
O'er whispering pines and campus fair,
With sturdy might filling the air:
Bowdoin! from birth the nurturer of men!
To thee we pledge our love again, again!

While now amid thy halls we stay
And breathe thy spirit day by day,
O may we thus full worthy be
To march in that proud company
Of poets, statesmen, and each son
Who brings thee fame by deeds well done:
Bowdoin! from birth the nurturer of men!
To thee we pledge our love again, again!

And when in future wanderings, we
Shall fainting yearn for glimpse of thee,
O then before our presence rise,
And may the light of thy dear eyes
Give sweetness to our fainting heart,
To us new life and strength impart:
Bowdoin! from birth the nurturer of men!
To thee we pledge our love again, again!

MEDIEVAL LYRICS

I

AM nunc veni, soror electa
Et prae cunctis mihi dilecta,
Lux meae clara pupillae,
Parsque maior animae meae.
Ego fui solus in silva
Et dilexi loca secreta ;
Frequenter effugi tumultum
Et vitavi populum multum.
Carissima, noli tardare ;
Studeamus nos nunc amare.

Come now, thou sister of my choice,
Thou dearest of my earthly joys,
Mine eyes see thy clear light alone :
Thy soul is filling all my own.
In the lone wood I sought to dwell
And thought I loved the secret dell.
I fled, how often ! from the loud
Contentious babble of the crowd.
O dearest one, no more delay,
But let us love and love today.

II

Lydia bella, puella candida,
Quae bene superas lac et liliū
Albamque, simul rosam rubidam
Aut expositum ebur indicum.

My Lydia's beauty's brighter far
Than whitest milk or lilies are,
Than white or red rose e'er may be,
Or polished Indian ivory.

III

Dum salutat me loquaci
Flora supercilio,
Mente satis iam capaci
Gaudia concipio.

If but Flora greet me, showing
That her brow doth question mine,
Though my heart be overflowing
What new pleasures I divine.

IV

Quid plus? Collo virginis
Brachia iactavi
Mille dedi basia,
Mille reportavi.

Can I know what greater bliss is?
For my arms were Love's own chain,
And I gave a thousand kisses,
And she gave them back again.

V

Ludo cum Caecilia,
Nihil timeatis;
Sum quasi custodia
Fragilis aetatis,
Ne marcescant lilia
Suae castitatis.

Sweet Cecilia, have no fears
If I jest with thee;
Of thy tender blooming years
Guardian I'd be,
Lest thou miss with futile tears
Lilied purity.

VI

O Roma nobilis, orbis et domina,
Cunctorum urbium excellentissima,
Roseo martyrum sanguine rubea,
Albis et virginum liliis candida.
Salutem dicimus tibi per omnia,
Te benedicamus, salve per saecula.

O noble Rome, thou Queen of all the world,
O'er all its cities are thy flags unfurled;
Thy purple is the blood of martyr's slain,
Thy white the lilies of the virgin-train;
Hail thou who bidest to the end of days!
Hail thou to whom we bring thy meed of praise!

VII

Levis exurgit zephyrus
Et sol procedit tepidus ;
Iam terra sinus aperit,
Dulcore suo diffluit.

Ver purpuratum exiit,
Ornatus suos induit ;
Aspergit terram floribus,
Ligna silvarum frondibus.

Struunt lustra quadrupedes
Et dulces nidos volucres ;
Inter ligna florentia
Sua decantant gaudia.

Quod oculis dum video
Et auribus dum audio,
Heu ! pro tantis gaudiis
Tantis inflor suspiriis.

Cum mihi sola sedeo
Et haec revolvens palleo,
Si forte caput sublevo,
Nec audio nec video.

Tu saltim, veris Gratia,
Exaudi et considera
Frondes, flores et gramina ;
Nam mea languet anima.

The west wind blows softly,
Warmer still glows the sun,
Earth's bosom is opened,
Sweet days are begun.

Purple spring has come forth,
And clad gorgeously
Scatters flowers on the earth,
Puts leaves on each tree.

Wild beasts strew their lairs;
Sweet birds their nests make
And chant forth their joys
O'er woodland and brake.

What delights meet my eyes!
What sounds reach my ears!
But alas for such joys!
Deep my sighs and my tears.

I sit here all alone,
I grow wan with my thought;
If I lift my head up
I see and hear nought.

But, O Spirit of Spring,
To grass, blossom and leaf,
Do thou have regard;
For my soul is in grief.

In lyrics I-VI the translator had the invaluable cooperation of Professor Henry Johnson.

THE CITY OF DIS

DANTE, *INFERNO* VIII, 67-87

AND the good master said: "And now, my son,
The city nears which bears the name of Dis,
With all its crowd, its laden citizens."
And I, "O master mine, already I discern
Within the valley there its mosques appear
Vermilion as if they were issuing
From flame." And he said then, "The eternal fire
Enkindling them within displays them red
As thou canst see, here in this nether hell."
We penetrated then to ditches deep
Which there surround that town disconsolate.
Its walls appeared to me as if of iron.
Not without making a wide circuit first
We reached the place whereat our boatman cried,
"Out! Out!", his voice was loud, "Here is the entering."
Above the gate more than a thousand forms
Of those rained down from heaven I saw who cried
In anger great, "Who is this that without death
Dares walk the Kingdom of the people dead?"
And my wise master made to them a sign
That he would parley with them secretly.

EHEU! FUGACES

HORACE, ODES II, 14

I

O POSTUMUS alas! The years in flight
Glide by; nor all your piety nor might
May halt encroaching wrinkles nor old age
Nor death inexorable once in sight.

II

Not, friend, if with three hecatombs a day
You placate tearless Pluto, shall you stay
His feet who holds the Geryon thrice vast
And Tityus within his gloomy sway;

III

And binds them with that wave o'er which indeed
All we who now on earth's great bounty feed
Must one day sail: no matter rich or poor,
Great kings or humble peasants in like need.

IV

In vain we shun the war-god's bloody hand
And waves that hoarsely break on Hadria's strand,
In vain through autumn tide our bodies fear
The pestilential winds from hot Sahara's sand.

V

The wandering river with its languid flow,
The black Cocytus and the Danaids' woe
 And Sisyphus, condemned to endless toil,
We all must one day go to see and know.

VI

The lands and home and wife to you so dear
Must all be left; and of the trees you rear
 Not one shall follow you, their short lived lord,
Beyond the grave, except the cypress drear.

VII

Your wine shall soon be quaffed by wiser heir,
The wine you locked and hoarded with such care
 In drunken pride the pavement white shall stain
In banquets richer than rich pontiff's fare.

WHOM THE GODS LOVE

A YEAR ago he sat where we now sit
And shared our gayety and feast and song,
A merry comrade in our merry throng,
Fond of all joy, of laughter and of wit;
For useful, earnest life his soul was fit,
And he was true and with devotion strong
He loved the college. To us it seems so long,
So short a while. And now the shadows flit
Across his seat. And now another star
Is put against another comrade on our roll.
So young he was, so gay, untouched by Time,
We had not dreamed he would have fared so far
In one short year. Another pure, strong soul
To show how precious Youth is, and sublime.

FOR A DIAL

MAY Time, relentless though he is and grim,
Pass kindly through your home in golden hours;
But glide by swiftly when the days are dim
And lay his healing hand on you and yours.

THE DAWN WILL SOON BE BREAKING

FROM THE PROVENÇAL OF GUIRAUT DE BORNELH

THE LOVER'S FRIEND SPEAKS:

I

KING glorious, true brightness and true light,
All powerful God, I pray thee in thy might
My comrade's life be faithfully defending
I have not seen him since the day was ending.
The dawn will soon be breaking.

II

Fair comrade mine! Dost thou still sleep or wake?
Sleep thou no more: thy slumbers softly break.
Lo! in the east I see the star ascending
Which I know well the daylight is portending.
The dawn will soon be breaking.

III

Fair comrade mine! I call thee as I sing.
Sleep thou no more. I hear the woodland ring
With her clear note that greets the day's appearing;
And that the jealous lord attack thee I am fearing.
The dawn will soon be breaking.

The alba or morning song owes its origin to the custom in the system of courtly love for the lover to be accompanied on his adventures by a comrade who should guard against all rivals and notify the lover when the tryst was over.

IV

Fair comrade mine! From out the casement spy
Behold the warning signs upon the sky,
Soon shalt thou know my love is never veering,
If thou heed not, great harm may thee be nearing.
The dawn will soon be breaking.

V

Fair comrade mine! E'er since I went from thee
I have not slept nor risen from bended knee,
But to St. Mary's Son have still been pleading
That safe to me my friend He will be leading.
The dawn will soon be breaking.

VI

Fair comrade mine! At yonder stony steep
Thou begg'dst that I should neither nod nor sleep
But keep my guard until the night's receding,
But neither song nor watch thou art now heeding.
The dawn will soon be breaking.

THE LOVER SPEAKS:

VII

Fair comrade sweet! Mine is so rich a plight
That I could wish it might be ever night!
The gentlest maid that e'er a mother blessed
I hold in love. I am no whit distressed
By jealous lord nor morning.

A PROLOGUE

TONIGHT is All Fools' Night; for all save one
The cap and gown are merrily dismissed
And in their stead jingle the cap and bells,
And Mardi Gras reigns here and Carnival.
In olden days, at Rome, the saucy slaves
On Saturnalian feast their masters mocked,
Nor did the merry masters bear it ill;
And we who are tonight your humble servants
Not in the house, but on the stage, do crave
Indulgence for our folly; for we hold
In all too small respect, for sober men,
Our masters, ladies and good sooth ourselves.
No Moral decks our tale, nor Satire shrewd;
For Fun points all our shafts. And now good luck!
And may you never be as these poor wights,
Whose misadventures we set forth for you,
Without a proper servant in the house.

LA VITA NUOVA

SOMETIMES when I have seen a city throng
Of maids and men go by in strenuous crowd
Crying the glories of the times aloud
With voices harsh, and looks and gestures strong;
Who never deem it strange nor fond nor wrong
Their strength is even for Love himself too proud,
Their bodies with humility ne'er bowed,
Rejoicing in the stress as in a song;
Then comes in vision a fair child of old
Passing in modesty along her way,
Her very tender years in crimson clad;
Clearly I hear the poet's cry, "Behold
A god more strong than I who shall me sway."
Again with the new life the heart is glad.

ALL SAINTS' DAY IN NEW ENGLAND

THE dawn is cold and gray, and on the ground
The dead leaves rustle hither and away,
The town awakes to life in drab array
By dull routine of this world's duty bound ;
On a side street a church bell's solemn sound
Shows that for some this is a sacred day,
The candles shine, in foreign tongues they pray
And many in the throng in black are gowned.

Outside there hurries by the busy man
Who thinks for once and aye the dead are dead ;
Within from mass and fervent prayers there rise
Voices that hope from souls to raise the ban ;
And while the east with light glows softly red,
Some pray for brightness that the dead may prize.

THE DECENNIAL

ποιεῖν τι δεῖ, ἄς γόνυ χλωρόν.—*Theocritus.*

TEN years have gone; and with a sweeter sound
The chapel bell now rings, while through the trees,
Shading loved walks and stirred by gentler breeze,
The sunlight falls more softly on the ground.
Fond memory mellows what the past once bound
Crudely and fast. The hours that at our ease
We spent are joyous; Time did not then tease
To use each tiny moment that we found.

Yes: much there is to cheer us in those years.
But as we think of dreams, ambitions high
Not half fulfilled, each girds himself anew
To do his task, strong through his hopes and fears,
Before the hair be gray, or vigor die,
And while the heart of youth still spurs to do.

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